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ABSTRACT

This paper presents data from the first year of a study that seeks to reveal the effective practices and structures that address the match between the philosophy of Title I and beliefs and practices at the school site. A national study has been designed to investigate the compliance and effectiveness of urban schoolwide Title I programs. As part of this study, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) selected the Empowerment Zone within the Atlanta (Georgia) city limit that includes the Atlanta public school system. One high-performing school and one school with scores lower than expected were studied through surveys of parents, teachers, principals, and students and interviews with principals and teachers, supplemented by classroom observations. Parent surveys revealed that legislative expectations, such as high standards, were being implemented at the more effective school. Teachers and principals also thought that Title I was bringing new opportunities to the school. At this school, teachers consistently identified the school's vision for learning in terms of high standards for students. Parents and teachers at the less effective school were much less certain of the role of Title I in fulfilling its legislative expectations, and much less sure of the school's mission. Implications for improved schoolwide practices derived from this study center on leadership by principals, who must have knowledge of the possibilities of educational improvement under Title I. (SLD)

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Urban Elementary Schools Implementing Title I School-wide Projects: Issues of Leadership, School Climate and Philosophy of Teaching and Learning.

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Introduction

Congress declared in 1965 that it would be the policy of the United States of America to provide high quality education for all individuals as well as a fair and equitable opportunity to obtain that education. This in part embodied the governments' "War on Poverty" program. National efforts such as Chapter I focused on improving the education for children in poverty by instituting targeted "pull-out" programs and remediation efforts, which resulted in marginal impact on student achievement for children from poor communities. Approximately five to six years ago the U.S. Department of Education presented the results of a longitudinal study, Reinventing Chapter 1: The Current Chapter 1 program and New Directions (U.S. Department of Education), which outlined some necessary changes in the philosophy and structure of the program if academic gains were to be truly sought for all children. Many of these recommendations are reflected in the 1994 reauthorization of Title 1 in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the goals 2000: Educate America Act.

The current re-design of Title 1 provides communities facing high rates of poverty related to their student populations the resources necessary to improve academic performance. These children frequently come from limited English proficient families, migrant families, families with low literacy skills or from neglected settings. These factors have tremendous

implications for a child's success in their educational setting. The over arching goal was to get States and local districts to align their federal resources and policies to improve learning for students at risk. Central to this was the need a) to develop standards and assessments that require higher levels of achievement for all students and b) to encourage the use of effective school strategies to improve learning for students at risk. This redesign of Title I rejected the notion of creating lower standards for children at risk for academic failure. Better yet it developed a more integrative and standards based philosophy.

Title I currently offers over 7 million dollars in federal money to fund system-wide resources to improve learning opportunities for students at risk for academic failure. These funds reach over 6 million students and are generally utilized to improve the areas of reading and math. Of the over 7 billion dollars allocated for Title I nationally, approximately 99 percent is utilized at the local level for professional development, supplementary education, parent involvement, technology, staffing, and other research based strategies that will improve student achievement. As a result over 11 million students nationally are served by these allocations. In short what the reauthorization of Title I did was to provide the flexibility necessary for utilizing dollars resourcefully, at the local level, while also providing a framework of accountability that required high standards for all students.

The challenge for schools however, over the past six years has been a shift from the paradigm of "targeted and segregated resources" to integrated and whole school reform. Additionally, this challenge has called for schools to truly dispel the "deficit" hypothesis and to embrace a philosophy of high academic standards for all students despite the incidences of poverty, neglect, or LEP conditions. Looking at a school's vision, leadership and school climate is one way of "peeling off" the layers to determine if the philosophy of Title I is matched to the beliefs and practices at the school site. This paper will present first year data findings of a study that seeks to reveal the effective practices and structures that address the match.

The Study

In 1995 the Laboratory for Student Success along with invited "sister" laboratories sought to conduct a national study of the compliance and effectiveness of urban school-wide Title I programs. The purpose of the study is two-fold: (a) to develop a national study that would result in a database on the procedural knowledge of urban Title I school-wide programs and (b) to provide technical assistance to local schools in establishing and maintaining effective school-wide programs that result in improved students outcomes. SERVE was among the laboratories that joined this network in late 1996. Among the tasks of these partners was the need to identify both effective school-wide sites and less effective school-wide sites geographically in the

Federally designated Empowerment Zones (EZ) and Enterprise Zones (EC). These EZ and EC communities were part of President Clinton's initiative to revitalize areas of high concentrations of poverty and economic distress. With the support of federal funds, these local initiatives generally targeted efforts related to employment opportunities, education, business and community development. In focusing on these communities the design of the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) study potentially could identify the impact of community and educational effects on the improvement of academic outcomes for students.

In the SERVE region the EZ and EC zones were limited to the communities of Atlanta, Georgia and the Mississippi Delta respectively. SERVE selected the Empowerment Zone within the Atlanta City limit that includes the Atlanta Public School system. The Atlanta Public School system assisted in the identification of sites by providing elementary, middle and high school data over a six-year period 1990-1996. This data was analyzed by LSS (Yancey, Breeding, & Freely, 1997) to determine the relationships between social and demographic characteristics of student bodies and school-wide average achievement test scores. Yancey et al. had identified social and economic characteristics related to academic achievement in other major urban school districts. In Atlanta, the average daily attendance, the percent of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, the percent who are African Americans and the level of the school (elementary, middle or high) were related to the expected school-

wide average reading achievement scores. An examination of the degree to which schools displayed higher or lower achievement scores than expected based on the above variables was conducted. Schools that portrayed achievement scores that were consistently above or below what was expected were then identified as "exceptional" schools. Following this procedure, SERVE in collaboration with the school district identified one consistently high performing school and one school that had scores that was lower than expected. They were selected as the study sites for a longitudinal descriptive study over a three-year period (1997-2000).

Qualitative Instruments

The data collection of the study design was created to be multi-level and multi-dimensional (Wang, Haertel, and Walberg, 1993). These sources of data included:

a) *Surveys/Questionnaires*- Surveys were administered to parents, teachers, principals and students to gain understanding of the school climate, teaching and learning, leadership, and legislative expectations related to Title 1 implementation.

b) *Interviews*- Interviews were conducted with principals and teachers to determine how resources were allocated, professional development practices, inclusion practices, instructional practices, parent involvement, collegiality, and school vision.

c. Observations- Observations were conducted in grades three, four and five for both reading and math classes. The instrument that was utilized was the LSS/ ALEM model. These observations were conducted on both students and teachers to determine the frequency and quality of interactions that occurred in classroom settings. This observational data provides information regarding the degree of actual implementation of legislative expectations.

The History of District and School Sites

The Atlanta Public School System is one of several large school districts in the surrounding Atlanta metropolitan area. Other large school districts include Cobb County, DeKalb County, Fulton County, Gwinnett County. There are over 100 schools in the Atlanta Public School System including alternative schools and community schools. There are 11 high schools serving grades 9-12, 14 middle schools, and there are 61 elementary schools with full day kindergarten. Over 90% of the schools have Title I school-wide programs. This was a district wide initiative in which most schools took part.

The two schools that took part in this study were School X labeled "more effective" and School Y labeled "less effective" for the purposes of this study. Neither school was aware of these labels during the conduct of the study.

School W maintained a stable leadership with the principal in excess of ten years. The staff at School W had veteran teachers of five or more years. There were only three first year teachers on staff. The school has maintained high levels of academic performance despite the multiple risk factors of the children and community. School P has been one of the lowest performing schools in the district for many years. The school had recently been "reconstituted" therefore, the principal was fairly new. The basic premise of "reconstitution" is that failing schools purge themselves of everything except the students and the building. The reconstitution of schools can involve this total purging of staff and principal or it can simply require staff to reapply for their jobs. This strategy once considered a last resort has become a popular tool for correcting the complex problems of urban communities such as Chicago, Philadelphia and Cleveland. Interestingly, the staff interviewed at school P for the most part was relatively young in the education profession (i.e. 1-7 years). Another interesting achievement at this school during the data collection process was that ITBS scores improved considerably over a two-year period of time. The principal at School P has now been moved to another school within the district.

The following pages provide a summary of some of the relevant data collected at both sites. These summaries are provided as descriptive cases and have not been compared with one another. There is however, some data provided that compares

Schools' W and P with other "more effective" and "less effective" schools nationally. The paper concludes with implications for practice that may influence the continuous improvement of Title I service for children at risk for failure.

Implementation Practices- (*School W*)

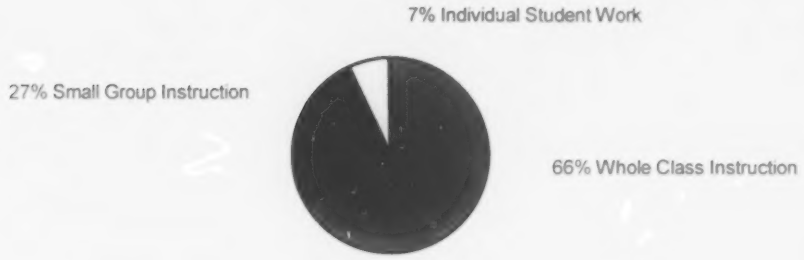
- Parent surveys revealed agreement that legislative expectations such as high standards for all children were being implemented. They also perceived that the level of parent involvement was high. When the level of perceptions on both these measures were compared to the national mean of the more effective schools, *School W* was the same or slightly higher. However, the parents' perceptions on the availability resources were lower than both the less effective and more effective school means nationally.
- Teacher perceptions of legislative expectations were that Title I provides a wealth of instructional materials. Additionally, they expressed that all teachers were considered Title I teachers.
- Principal perceptions of legislative expectations were that Title I provides a vehicle for allocating resources to match the communities resources to meet *School's W's* needs. In doing this she has utilized funds to hire staff to reduce class size, to create after school programs (Karate, dance, Art, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts),

to purchase computers, and to purchase instructional supplies to supplement hands-on math instruction. Additionally, the principal viewed School W's relationship with the Marriott Corporation as an asset. Another critical community relationship is that of a medical doctor from a local medical university. This physician and the Marriott Corporation opened and maintained a community health center across the street from the school. This community center supports the families of the children in the school through health services, men & boys night out, women & girls night out, workshops on parenting, a pre-K program, and a " Hands on Atlanta" tutoring program.

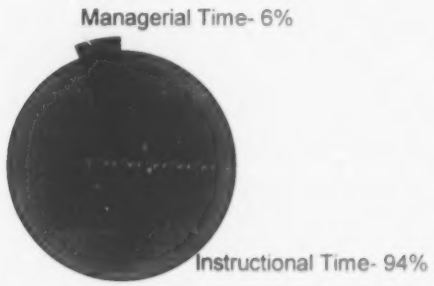
Vision of teaching and learning- In interviews with teachers, they consistently identified the school's vision for learning in terms of high standards for students. They made statements such as " to promote higher standards for all" and " to have all students to score above the 50th percentile in reading and mathematics". Teachers expressed that they utilized an inter-related curriculum for students and expressed that curriculum momentum was monitored through regular student assessment (tests, observation, student performance tasks, writing samples, etc.). They report that they incorporate cooperative learning strategies, use of manipulatives, and modeling in their instructional plans. The observational sessions at this site revealed an abundance of whole class instruction sessions. This

was coupled with a high level of interaction with teachers (66%) versus the degree of small group or independent work (27%) occurring in classrooms (see Graph 1). The observation sessions also revealed that the majority of teachers' time was dedicated to instruction (94%) versus managing student behavior (6%) (see Graph 2).

Classroom Instructional Settings (School W)
Graph 1



Percentages of Instructional Time (School W)
Graph 2



Leadership - In the interview, principal W expressed that her view of leadership is to increase the level of student achievement for all students. Her primary focus area to accomplish this was not on curriculum but rather focused on changing the attitudes of teachers in their interactions with students. The parents' expressed uncertainty about their perceptions of school leadership. Unfortunately, data on teacher's views of school leadership has not yet been tabulated.

School Climate and Community - Parents indicated that teachers and students get along well. They also felt that teachers encouraged students to do their best and often displayed personal interest in the children. However, the mean score (4.11) was still slightly lower than the national mean score (4.17) of more effective schools. The parent perceptions of students attitudes was actually higher (4.10) than the opinions of parents nationally (4.08) from more effective schools. Parents generally agreed that the school suffered from problems such as student tardiness, absenteeism and vandalism. This was comparatively similar to other urban schools nationally. Teachers described a sense of collegial support in that Special Education teachers were utilized as resource people who come into the classroom to assist instructionally. This also increased opportunities for one on one instruction. Teachers also described a climate in which they "trade" students to reduce class size for specific lessons and in order to match the student needs to each teacher's instructional strength. Overwhelmingly teachers indicated that

they receive adequate professional development as needed. They also expressed a regular culture of sharing and planning at each grade level.

Implementation Practices- *(School P)*

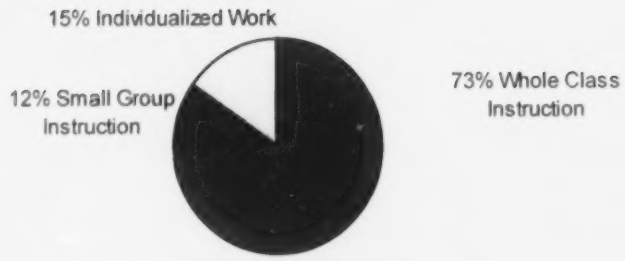
- Parents' legislative expectations regarding student performance showed a similar level of uncertainty to that of parents from less effective schools nationally. They regarded the schools' resources as less than adequate, which was similar to the reflections of other parents from less effective schools nationally. Parents were also uncertain about whether or not there was a high level of parent involvement.
- Teachers' level of uncertainty regarding the legislative expectations for student performance goals was high. Many teachers' had little or no knowledge regarding Chapter I practices or Title I guidelines. The teachers' knowledge of state and district content standards however, was evident through their statements. There was the perception among the teachers that they evaluate student performance and provide students with information regarding their progress daily. This was supported by a mean of 4.19 as compared with other less effective schools nationally 3.99.
- The principal's perception of legislative expectations was that Title I has been utilized as vehicle for

revitalizing the school. This principal has not viewed Title I as being separate from his total school program. He expressed that he has utilized the funds to provide one on one support to students in their classrooms in the areas of readings and math. These resources have been paired with resources from Title II, Title IV and corporate monies to develop the school's program. Additionally, technology has been viewed as an integral component in the learning process of the children in School P. All classrooms have adequate student teacher ratios to maximize the effectiveness of technology as a tool.

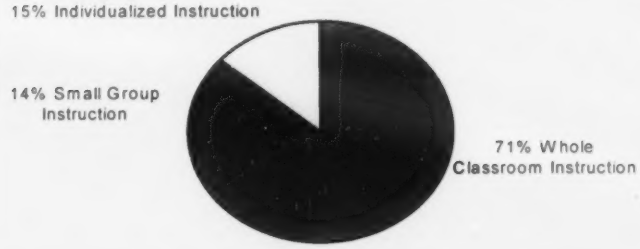
Vision for Teaching and Learning- Overall there appeared to be a lack of knowledge regarding the schools vision. Most teachers could not express it or they stated that the principal sets the vision. One veteran teacher expressed that the vision of teaching and learning for school P was to raise the performance level of students on standardized tests. There was a specific emphasis on math and reading. Due to a special NASA project, there was a school-wide theme for a space component. Technology was a strong component in the space laboratory, the classrooms and the computer laboratory. Among the teachers there was strong agreement that the curriculum standards were set by the district as the schools guide. They also recognized that the district standards were aligned with the state standards. Teachers indicated that they utilized a variety of instructional

strategies. Each teacher interviewed communicated the importance of assessment as a part of the learning process and it also provided feedback on instructional needs. Teachers indicated that they regularly assessed students using tools such as paper/pencil tests, ITBS gain, and portfolios in language arts and demonstration projects. Through classroom observations the following findings were discovered. The majority of instruction was conducted in whole class settings (73%), with individualized work following (15%) and the least amount of instruction observed took place in small group settings (12%)(see Graph 3). These percentages appear to be comparatively close to the national percentages from other less effective schools, which were 71%, 15% and 14% respectively (see Graph 4). The observational data portrayed the majority of the teachers time (89%) is spent interacting with students was for instructional purposes. This was considerably higher than other less effective schools nationally (77%). School P's teachers also appeared to spend a minimal amount of time on managing student behavior (9%) versus that of other less effective schools nationally (12%).

Graph 3



Classroom Instructional Settings in Other "Less Effective" Schools Nationally- Graph 4



Leadership - The parent's (School P) expressed a level of uncertainty regarding the principal's leadership, which was commensurate with that of parents from other less effective schools nationally. However, the teacher's perception of the principals leadership was a considerably lower mean (2.65) than that of other less effective schools nationally (3.70). The principal's view of his leadership responsibilities was to 'revitalize a school that has been the lowest scoring school on ITBS in the district for over eight years." His expressed vision was to provide the remedial support needed to all students that were underachievers to in order to bring them up to grade level.

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School Climate and Community - Parents' perception of the quality of student and teacher interactions was uncertain. Parents from other less effective schools nationally agreed that student teacher interactions were good (4.02). Teachers at School P however, expressed that the student teacher relationships were high (4.29). The data from this characteristic was also higher than the mean of less effective schools nationally (4.13). The level of parent satisfaction with the school P revealed a high level of uncertainty. This also matched the level of satisfaction of other parents nationally from less effective schools. Parents and teachers at school P expressed uncertainty about the students' attitude also. Parents and teachers seem to perceive that the school had a minimal amount of school problems such as tardiness, conflicts and vandalism. This data did not vary from that of other data from less effective schools nationally. The data from teachers' surveys and teacher interviews indicated that there was a strong sense of collegial support among teachers. This was especially true in grade levels where there were practices of team teaching and teachers teaching all students in a grade level based on their field of expertise. Additionally, teachers emphasized that they plan regularly together. With regard to their view of the principals' leadership however the results were lower (2.65) than that of other less effective schools nationally (3.70). In the principal's interview he expressed great difficulty in impacting parent involvement. He indicated that he provides both bus

transportation and food as support services for parent meetings. Although these services help they have not resulted in the level of parent involvement that he desires.

Implications for School-wide Practices

The under-girding philosophy of Title I, integrated yet flexible services, and high standards of achievement, provides a foundation upon which to build a quality structure. In the preliminary data received from both School W and School P there was evidence that variations in specific attributes can have an influence the effectiveness of school-wide projects and therefore impact student achievement. The three primary attributes that this set of data shows influence upon are 1) leadership, 2) school climate and community, and 3) vision of teaching and learning.

There are several implications that have evolved from this LSS study that imply attributes for principals to make a lasting impact with school-wide reform.

- Principals must have knowledge of curriculum and instructional strategies that can result in the desired school and students outcomes.
- Principal must display skills and knowledge in motivating and supporting staff to create and adopt their schools' vision.

- Principals must possess the ability to elicit parent and community involvement through effective communication skills.

Leadership is necessary from several directions including parents, teachers and principals. Principals are probably the most important enabling leaders in the school setting. In a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, (1998) principals reported using a high level of content and performance standards for all students. Principals reported that they were familiar with Title I. Yet there was no guarantee that knowledge of guidelines correlated with awareness of how to implement guidelines.

Principals or lead teachers must be trained in new methods of collaborative management and facilitation skills to work with teacher decision making teams. They also must demonstrate the ability to evaluate programs and make budget allocations that lead to the school's vision (Odden & Clune, 1995). Newman and Wehlage (1995), indicate that through the development of a "professional community" there exists a sense of shared common goals as well as collaborative curriculum planning and assessment activities. Most importantly staff shares collective responsibility for the school and measures their success though continuous reflection and evaluation of outcomes and results.

The issue of leadership is directly related to the issue of creating strong parent and community involvement. This also means that principals and teachers must determine parents needs.

Educators therefore must develop mechanisms that engage parents in goal setting to achieve the schools' vision. This requires thinking beyond the traditional structures of parent involvement. In large measure a great deal of this can be accomplished by effective and varied communication methods. This type of effort requires high visibility and accessibility with the larger community. It also requires all leaders in the school to seek opportunities that contribute to the schools vision using the available community resources.

Last of all, but most importantly is the issue of the schools' vision of teaching and learning. Again the lines are blurred as the issue of leadership appears as an integral factor. School leaders must communicate their values clearly and effectively regarding the importance of ensuring each child's success academically despite factors of culture, language, poverty or race. Of primary importance to this belief is the respect of the strengths, knowledge and experiences that children bring to school as a foundation for scaffolding new and meaningful learning experiences. This requires a rejection of the deficit hypothesis regarding Title I eligible students. It also requires school staff to reshape curriculum and assessment techniques to be aligned with state and local standards while making connections to each student's experiences out of the classroom and in their home culture. Finally, it requires an emphasis on cognitive and social processes such as problem

solving in cooperative groups, research and modeled demonstrations of application in the "real world".

Conclusion

A study by the RAND Corporation (Grissmer, Kirby, Berends, & Williamson, 1994) summates that the increase in performance among minority students is attributable at least in part to Title I. Furthermore, the gains evidenced through the data spanning 1970-1990 support the notion that the investments of Title I have resulted in both Hispanic and Black students steady academic improvements (O'Day and Smith, 1993).

The results from the National Assessment of Title I by an independent review panel indicate some promising trends among the very populations Title I is targeted to impact. The findings in this recent evaluation of Title I concluded that students from high poverty communities have improved steadily in reading and mathematics. This trend is supported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data from high poverty schools over a three-year period.

In reading these gains have been attributed to 4th graders (receiving free and reduced meals) in the bottom 25 % who have raised their scores from 5-9 points. In mathematics 4th grade students (receiving free and reduced meals) in the lowest 25% showed an overall increase of 8 points between 1990-1996. Although there has been this steady incline there is still a

significant gap between the performance of these students to their peers.

Results of all these data sets indicate the potential for students to benefit from the new philosophy and practices of Title I. Through the alignment of rigorous curriculum and assessment standards and the development of collaborative and cohesive school-wide approaches there is optimism for improving instructional practice and academic achievement for all students.

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